

News Analysis: Military value at heart of BRAC

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WASHINGTON (AFPS, May 9, 2005) -- The U.S. military fighting the war on terrorism is far different from the military forces developed to confront the Soviet Union.

Today's military is smaller than the Cold War force. It is already more agile and more flexible. And experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan show that joint operations enable the military to focus more power, more quickly exactly where it is needed.

The impetus to change will increase in coming years, and the base-realignment-and-closure process will allow the Defense Department to match force structure with the necessary capabilities.

The BRAC process is a chance for the department "to get it right, right now," said a senior defense official. Changes in the global military posture and the need to reduce overhead have combined to offer the military the perfect opportunity to rationalize the military infrastructure to the force structure needed for the future.

The process will also allow the military to improve its efficiency and place emphasis on joint training and operations. "A primary objective of BRAC 2005 is to examine and implement opportunities for greater jointness," officials said.

The process is meant to allow the secretary and the BRAC commissioners to look across traditional lines to examine the potential for jointness. In fact, in the department, the entire decision-making process is joint at every level, said officials.

There are more than 520,000 DoD-owned facilities worldwide. Some are small plots of land with radio or radar towers. Others are huge ranges and bases. All are being looked at to determine how each property fits into the new force-structure plan.

This force structure plan, together with statutory selection criteria, will be the basis for all decisions. Developed by the Joint Staff, the plan is based on the new national security and defense strategies. It looks out 20 years and tries to forecast threats; probable end-strength levels and anticipated funding levels. The selection criteria were published in the Federal Register in December 2003 and later modified by Congress. The final selection criteria are set out in the BRAC statute, which specifies that "military value" as the primary consideration in making any closure or realignment decision. Military value is reflected in the first four selection criteria and includes the current and future capabilities needed and the impact on operational readiness of a post, base, range or installation. This

includes the impact an installation has on joint warfighting, joint training and joint readiness.

In addition, military value includes the availability and condition of land, facilities and associated airspace. Military officials have looked at training areas that will exercise forces in a variety of climates and terrains.

Military value also includes a "surge capability" that allows the department to accommodate mobilization.

Finally, military value includes the cost of operations and manpower implications.

The remaining criteria consider the extent and timing of potential costs and savings; the economic impact on existing communities in the vicinity of military installations; the ability of the infrastructure of communities to support forces, missions and personnel; and finally, the environmental impact, including the impact of costs associated with environmental restoration, waste management and environmental compliance.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's BRAC recommendations are due to be published not later than May 16. At that point the BRAC Commission, led by former Veterans Affairs Secretary Anthony Principi, will examine the recommendations. The commission's findings are due to President Bush not later than Sept. 8.

The president must approve or disapprove the whole list; he cannot agree with some recommendations and disagree with others.

If he approves the recommendations, the list goes to Congress, where senators and representatives have 45 "legislative days" to enact a joint resolution of disapproval. If they do not, then the list has the force of law.

Under the BRAC statute, actions to close or realign a base must be initiated within two years of the date the president transmits the BRAC Commission's recommendations report to Congress and must be completed within six years of that same date.

(Editor's note: Jim Garamone writes for the American Forces Press Service.)